

6 December 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: DCI

FROM:

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SUBJECT: How to Evaluate Finished Intelligence

1. Some time back you forwarded to me one or two PFIAB papers that addressed the issue of how useful our finished intelligence has been to policymakers. More recently, I've read DDI's consumer survey.

2. In my judgment, all evaluations of this sort are invalid. This memo explains why, and suggests a more useful approach.

3. You don't tailor intelligence products to what policymakers say they want; you tailor it to what policymakers need--whether they want it or not. Say, for example, that ten policymakers make clear that the time has come to go to the mat with Japan on the trade issue and that they need "good intelligence." One doesn't necessarily produce a document that outlines how badly the US is being hurt by Japanese policies. A more valuable product might suggest the impact on Japanese politics of increased US pressure. This may not be what the policymakers want to read--but it may be the right product nevertheless.

-- The trick, obviously, is to stay in close touch with policymakers, to listen carefully to them, and then to translate what one hears into the most useful products. It is this ability to translate the policymakers' perceptions of their needs into the right products that distinguishes good finished intelligence. [I know of no successful publication that lets its readers choose the contacts.] At the same time, good intelligence responds to trends and events regardless of the policymakers' agenda.

4. In short, you don't evaluate finished intelligence by asking the consumers' opinion of it. You judge it by its internal quality--and, more importantly, by the reasoning that led to its being produced in that form and at that time.

5. More precisely, you look at a year's work and ask: was this the best way to use our resources in light of the trends, the events that took place and the issues policymakers grappled with. For instance, if major decisions on US-Japan relations were made in April, and if an NIE on this subject was published in June, you don't need a consumer survey to know that something is wrong. Likewise if the NIE was issued at the appropriate time, but approached the subject in an inappropriate fashion. On the other hand, if policymakers ignored a crucial development during the year despite excellent intelligence, you can't fault the intelligence producers for not "responding" to what the policymakers perceived as their needs. [You could use the intelligence to judge the policymakers, but that's another issue. I know of no survey in which policymakers set out to learn what intelligence officials think of the policies concocted based upon the intelligence produced.]

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6. You judge finished intelligence only by its own standards--by its internal quality and by the context in which the intelligence was produced. this is a much more difficult approach to follow. But the results will be valid, and therefore useful.



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